

Printed for the War Cabinet. May 1944. ✓

43

SECRET.

Copy No. 36

W.P. (44) 257.

16th May, 1944.

**WAR CABINET.**

**PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF A REFUGEE CAMP IN  
TRIPOLITANIA.**

**MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS.**

I should be grateful for the views of my colleagues in the following matter:—

2. In April 1943 the Anglo-American Conference met in Bermuda to recommend steps to deal with the international refugee question. One of the principal problems was (and emphatically still is) the establishment of adequate reception camps or centres for the temporary reception of many thousands of those refugees from German oppression for whose maintenance His Majesty's Government have, in conjunction with the United States Government, undertaken responsibility. The British Delegation agreed to recommend for reconsideration a proposal made by the United States Delegation that a refugee centre should be established in Cyrenaica. A similar proposal had been made at the beginning of the year by the Greek Government, but had been opposed by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, at a time when the area was in, or near, the scene of military operations. At the same time both Delegations undertook to recommend to their respective military authorities that they should authorise the establishment of a refugee centre in North Africa, at Fedhala near Mogador, to receive refugees who had escaped from German-occupied Europe into Spain and who constituted a source of friction with the Spanish authorities. Resistance to this latter project, however, was encountered from the United States military authorities. After further inter-departmental discussion a recommendation was submitted to the Prime Minister that he should send a personal telegram to the President urging the importance of securing a favourable decision on the Fedhala camp. This was done, and a reply was received from the President on the 10th July, 1943, agreeing to the establishment of the camp, but at the same time recording his understanding that the possibility of using Cyrenaica and Tripolitania for the establishment of similar refugee centres was being studied by the British authorities. It was plain that the President regarded this latter development as being in the nature of a return for his assistance in prevailing upon the United States, and also the French, authorities to agree to the establishment of the Moroccan centre, to which refugees from Spain are now about to be sent.

3. The question of the establishment of refugee camps in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania was thereupon referred to the Minister Resident in the Middle East. As regards Cyrenaica the objections, in particular friction with the local Arab inhabitants, are substantial, but they appear to me to be much less so in respect of Tripolitania. The Minister Resident and the military authorities in the Middle East, however, maintained their objections on the ground that, though a camp could be provided, it would be at the expense of military operational requirements. In October the matter was taken up with the War Office, and finally, in view of direct representations from the United States Embassy at the end of March of this year, personally with the Secretary of State for War, who, however, maintained the previous military objections.

4. The reasons for requiring the camp, the objections and the overriding advantages may be recapitulated as follows. It was understood by the British and United States Delegations at the Bermuda Conference that they should

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4. The reasons for requiring the camp; the objections and the overriding advantages may be recapitulated as follows. It was understood by the British and United States Delegations at the Bermuda Conference that they should

recommend respectively the establishment of refugee centres in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania on the one hand and in Morocco on the other, on a basis of the administration and maintenance, &c., being shared equally between the two Governments. It was also understood that in return for American assistance in securing the Moroccan camp, to which we attach much importance in order to clear Spain of refugees, we should establish a camp in either Tripolitania or Cyrenaica. Cyrenaica, however, proved unworkable; but the political objections in the case of Tripolitania are, in my view, not at all insuperable, while the force of the military objections (*e.g.*, difficulty of supplies and shipping and personnel) would seem to be much diminished by the fact that complete United States co-operation in all these spheres, as also in finance, is assured. Moreover, apart from the importance of His Majesty's Government fulfilling their side of a bargain with the United States Government, the establishment of the camp is likely to prove of great importance for the future. Already large numbers of refugees are leaving Yugoslavia. Accommodation will have to be found for them and there is the further possibility of an increasing outflow of Jews from various points in the Balkans. Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon are all playing their part in accommodating large numbers of refugees for whom His Majesty's Government assumed responsibility. I am of the opinion that Tripolitania, too, must be brought into the scheme, and that, particularly in view of American desires and assurances of help, the military objections are outweighed by considerations of general policy and the importance of maintaining equal co-operation between His Majesty's Government and the United States Government in questions affecting refugees.

A. E.

*Foreign Office, 16th May, 1944.*

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